

# 9 Sharing the Road Safely — Be Courteous!

Drivers of all ages need to be concerned with traffic laws, courtesy, and safety. This section reminds you that you share the road with a variety of traffic such as commercial trucks, emergency vehicles, motorcycles, mopeds, bicyclists, and pedestrians. It is important to be patient with all who use the road. This section will help you understand how to drive in a manner that reduces the risk of a traffic crash and the risk of road rage.

Safe driving involves more than learning the basics of operating a vehicle and memorizing the rules of the road. Safe driving also requires good judgment and reflexes, experience, patience, and common sense.

A young driver's understanding and judgment may not be as well developed as an experienced driver's. Middle-aged drivers may grow complacent about their driving ability after years of driving. Older drivers have years of experience on the road, but may face challenges brought about by losses in vision, hearing, attentiveness, decision-making ability, or reaction time. Research indicates older drivers can improve their driving ability through additional training, enabling them to maintain their driver's license while driving safely. Some communities offer driving skill programs for older drivers.

## **Distracted Driving**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates driver distractions account for 25 percent to 30 percent of the 6.5 million crashes recorded nationally every year. Even seemingly simple tasks such as tuning a radio can be risky, especially in bad weather or heavy traffic. In the estimated quarter of a second it takes the brain to shift

attention between two tasks, a car going 65 mph covers 24 feet. Here are ways you can minimize in-vehicle distractions:

- If you use a cellular phone, use an imbedded or hands-free model. Don't make or accept calls during demanding driving situations such as heavy traffic, winding roads, or bad weather. Don't take notes or look up phone numbers while driving. Avoid stressful or confrontational conversations.
- Pre-program your favorite radio stations for easy access and arrange tapes and CDs in an easy-to-reach spot.
- Designate a front-seat passenger to serve as a "co-pilot," rather than fumble with maps or navigation systems. If you are driving alone, map out destinations in advance.
- If you can't avoid eating while driving, choose easy-to-handle items and make sure all drinks are secured in cup holders.
- Teach children the importance of good behavior and remaining buckled up while in a vehicle. Don't underestimate how distracting it can be to tend to them in the car.
- Take a break if you find yourself "lost in thought" while driving.

## **Tips for Sharing the Road When Driving**

When driving, you'll share the road with pedestrians, trucks, farm tractors, and road repair and snow removal equipment. Keep the following guidelines in mind when driving:

- Use extra care when sharing the road with pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles, and mopeds. They are small and hard to see.
- Watch for delivery and commercial vehicles that make frequent stops. Allow more following distance than usual.

- Check your vehicle mirrors and look over your shoulder for approaching traffic when pulling into traffic from curbside parking or driveways.
- Be alert and listen for all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles and watch for signs warning of trails and crosswalks along the roadway.



## Pedestrians

As a driver, watch out and always yield the right-of-way to people walking, jogging, biking, crossing a street in the middle of a block, or darting from between parked vehicles. Watch for them when entering a street from a driveway or alley, at stop signs, traffic signals, crosswalks, and intersections.

After a traffic light turns green, yield to people crossing a street or vehicles that may still be turning in front of you or crossing the intersection.

When there are no sidewalks, pedestrians should walk on the side of the road facing oncoming traffic. Parents should teach their children this, but drivers must watch for pedestrians.

Be alert for joggers who may be running along roadways. Joggers should wear reflective clothing, use sidewalks or roadway shoulders, and avoid jogging at night, dawn, dusk, or during bad weather. Joggers, like other pedestrians, should be on the side of the road facing oncoming traffic.

## Blind Pedestrians

Michigan law requires you to stop or yield the right-of-way when you see a pedestrian with a white cane or guide dog. Only the blind may carry white canes. Avoid honking the horn or revving the engine; these noises are distracting and cover important audible cues used by the blind. Also avoid blocking designated crosswalks. This makes it especially difficult for a visually impaired or blind person to cross the street. It is also an inconvenience for others attempting to cross and violates the rule of always yielding to pedestrians.

## Emergency Vehicles

Yield the right-of-way to an emergency vehicle that is approaching from any direction or has stopped when it is displaying flashing warning lights and/or sounding a siren or other audible warning. Emergency vehicles include ambulances, fire department vehicles, police vehicles, and privately owned vehicles for firefighter or life support agencies.



Failure to yield or exercise due caution when passing a stopped emergency vehicle is a civil infraction. In addition, it is a felony to injure or kill emergency personnel for failure to yield or exercise due caution when passing a stationary emergency vehicle. For more information about the points given for traffic convictions involving emergency vehicles, please refer to pages 35, 50-56.

### When you see a stopped emergency vehicle:

- Slow down and move over a lane if possible. If traffic or other conditions prevent you from changing lanes, you must slow down and proceed with due caution.

### When an emergency vehicle is approaching:

- Pull over to the edge of the roadway, clear of intersections, and stop.
- Remain there until the emergency vehicle has passed. Watch for others. There may be several other emergency vehicles.
- Keep a foot on the brake so the brake lights let emergency vehicle drivers know you have stopped.
- Stay at least 500 feet behind any moving emergency vehicle displaying flashing warning lights and sounding a siren.
- Never pass a moving emergency vehicle displaying flashing warning lights unless directed to do so by the

emergency vehicle driver or a law enforcement officer.

## Sharing the Road with Commercial Vehicles



When a commercial vehicle such as a truck or a bus collides with smaller vehicles, people in the smaller vehicles are much more likely to be severely injured or killed. An automobile driver needs to know the following:

- Commercial vehicle drivers cannot stop or maneuver their vehicles as easily as a passenger vehicle.
- Commercial vehicle drivers may not be able to see vehicles alongside or close behind their commercial vehicles. Stay out of their blind spots.

The factors above are the result of size and weight differences between the two types of vehicles, but vehicle size and weight do not cause crashes—drivers do. Remember to:

- Keep a safe distance behind a truck or bus. Maintain a following distance of at least four seconds behind these and other large or special-use vehicles. Extend this distance as weather or road conditions deteriorate.
- Signal intended lane changes or turns well in advance.
- Never cut off a truck or bus, force it to slow down, or to stop suddenly.
- Allow enough time and distance to pass safely.
- Be careful when passing a truck or bus. Often, commercial vehicle drivers cannot see you.
- Be even more careful passing a truck with a trailer. Often, a driver must swing out to the left or right before making a turn. The driver may not see you and could force you off the road.
- Slow down if a truck or bus is passing you, especially during bad weather. Splash or spray from their tires can reduce visibility. Start your wipers before the vehicle passes.

- At night, use low beam headlights when following a truck or bus.

## Tips for Motorcycle Operators

Motorcycle operators have the right to use a full traffic lane. Sometimes they may be forced from one side of the lane to the other by strong winds or a bumpy road.



Motorcycle operators need to remember that, because of the motorcycle's smaller size, motorcycles appear to be farther away than they really are, making it hard for other motorists to judge their speed. Any crash between a larger vehicle and a motorcycle almost always injures or kills the motorcyclist.

Michigan law requires all motorcycle operators and passengers to wear approved, properly fastened safety helmets on their heads. The safety helmet must meet U.S. Department of Transportation standards and be properly labeled.

For protection, all motorcycle riders should wear gloves, reflective clothing, jackets and pants that cover arms and legs completely, and sturdy boots or shoes high enough to cover ankles.

When riding at 35 mph or more, motorcycle operators must use shatterproof goggles, a face shield, or windshield for eye protection. Eye protection is always recommended.

Motorcycle operators should use hand and arm signals even with their motorcycle's turn signals. For more information, obtain a *Michigan Motorcycle Operator Manual* at a Secretary of State branch office or visit the Secretary of State Web site.

## Tips for Sharing the Road with Motorcycles

- It is illegal to drive beside a motorcycle in the same traffic lane. However, two motorcycle riders may drive side by side in the same lane.
- Always treat motorcycle operators with courtesy.
- Leave plenty of extra space between your vehicle and a motorcycle ahead. Motorcycles can usually stop in shorter distances and may suddenly swerve to avoid obstacles.

- Pass as you would another vehicle, but not so fast or so close that your tires throw dirt or stones into the rider's face, or a draft from your vehicle blows the motorcycle about.
- Before changing lanes, check to see if a motorcycle is in the space where you plan to move. After you pass, look again before you move back into the other lane. Many motorcycle-vehicle crashes happen when drivers fail to check their blind spots before turning, changing lanes, backing up, or parking.
- When at intersections, watch for oncoming motorcycles and other small vehicles. Their smaller size makes it difficult to judge their distance and speed. Always exercise caution at intersections and allow motorcycles or other small vehicles to clear the intersection before beginning your turn.
- The single headlight or taillight of a motorcycle can blend into the lights of other vehicles. A single light in traffic may mean a motorcycle.
- When making left turns, be alert for possible oncoming motorcycles.
- Some motorcycles do not have self-canceling turn signals. So watch for clues such as motorcycle operators or passengers turning their heads to look behind, or motorcycle operators beginning to lean or tilt their bikes.
- When coming up behind a motorcycle, slow down sooner than you would for other vehicles. Leave plenty of space.
- When pulling out of a side street, remember that an oncoming motorcycle is probably much closer and coming much faster than it appears.

## **Bicycles and Mopeds**

Much of the advice about motorcyclists also applies to bicycle and moped riders. Bicycle and moped riders are allowed to ride in a traffic lane, but must stay as far to the

right as practical, obey traffic signals, not ride more than two abreast in a single lane, and must ride in the same direction as other traffic.

A bicycle or moped ridden after dark must have a front headlight and rear reflector. But these may be hard to see. A person riding a bicycle on a sidewalk meant for pedestrians must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and sound a horn or bell before overtaking and passing a pedestrian.

Watch the side of the road for bicycles and mopeds without reflectors. Be ready to dim the headlights. While it is safer not to, you may drive beside a bicycle or moped in the same lane. Leave plenty of room. A rider may turn sharply to avoid something in the road or a door being opened from a parked vehicle.

The Michigan Vehicle Code does not require vehicles such as go-peds and electric scooters to be registered. Some municipalities have outlawed the use of go-peds and electric scooters on roads and sidewalks.

Although the law only requires moped riders under age 19 to wear approved, properly fastened safety helmets, *all* moped and bicycle riders should wear them as well as reflective clothing.

## **The Segway Scooter (Electric Personal Assistance Mobility Devices)**

The Segway scooter is an upright, self-balancing, two-wheeled device that is powered by an electric propulsion system. To operate the scooter, riders stand on the scooter's platform using handlebars for support and shift their weight to propel, steer, and stop. The Segway has a top speed of 15 mph.

Under Michigan law, Segway scooters must follow many of the same regulations involving bicycles and mopeds, including yielding right-of-way to pedestrians and prohibiting the scooter's use on sidewalks or roads if bicycle paths are available. Segway scooters cannot be used on roads with a speed limit of more than 25 mph. In addition, passengers are



not allowed on Segway scooters and drivers must not carry any packages, articles, or objects that prevent them from keeping both hands on the scooter's handlebars. If the Segway scooter is ridden at night, it must be equipped with the same lights and reflectors as required on bicycles.

Michigan law also allows local municipalities to post signs in business districts or along waterfronts to further regulate the operation of Segway scooters based on the safety, health, and welfare of their residents. The Department of State does not title or register Segway scooters. For more information about the law and any local ordinances, please contact your local law enforcement agency.

## **School Buses: Alternately Flashing School Bus Lights\***

### **With Overhead Red Lights Only**



- Overhead red lights are flashing and bus is moving — prepare to stop.
- Overhead red lights are flashing and bus is stopped. Stop no closer than 20 feet from the bus.
- Proceed when red lights are turned off and it is safe to do so.



### **With Alternately Flashing Overhead Red and Yellow Lights**



- Overhead yellow lights are flashing — prepare to stop.
- Overhead red lights are flashing. Stop no closer than 20 feet from the bus.





- Proceed when red lights are turned off and it is safe to do so.

### All School Buses

- Yellow hazard warning lights are flashing on moving or stopped bus — proceed with caution.



It is not necessary to stop for a school bus that has stopped on the other side of a divided highway where the road is separated by a barrier.

\*AAA Michigan, 1994

## Aggressive Driving and Road Rage

Watch for aggressive drivers. Aggressive drivers run stop signs and red lights, speed, tailgate, weave their vehicles in and out of traffic, pass on the right, and may make improper hand gestures. They sometimes yell at you, honk their horns, or flash their headlights.

You must watch for these drivers because their actions place them and other motorists at an increased risk for traffic accidents. We have all seen aggressive drivers. They disregard their own safety as well as that of others. Do not be an aggressive driver. Be courteous and aware of the traffic around you. Take a moment to think about the driving behaviors that bother you. If you drive in the same manner, your behavior probably annoys other drivers. Avoid the following behaviors:

- Merging improperly. Failing to merge smoothly disrupts the flow of traffic. Always try to merge smoothly when entering the expressway or turning from one road to another. If you see a driver making an ill-advised merge or turn, slow down and give him or her room. Getting angry will not help and your anger could adversely affect your judgment, resulting in a traffic crash. A driver may be wrong, but how important is it to prove you are right? Do

not risk injury or death because you feel you have been wronged when driving. It is much wiser to back off and allow the driver to merge.

- Driving slowly in the left lane. Use all lanes properly and obey the speed limit. If you are using the left-hand lane to pass slower traffic and someone tailgates you, move back into the right-hand lane when it is safe to do so and allow the faster traffic to move ahead. Driving in the left-hand lane and allowing traffic to build up behind you increases the chances aggressive drivers may take careless risks attempting to get around you.
- Tailgating. This is another aggressive-driver trait. If another driver tailgates you, pull over and let him or her pass. It is much better to have these unsafe drivers in front where you can see them rather than having them driving on your rear bumper.
- Gestures. Never gesture at other drivers when you become angry. If another driver is gesturing to you when you have made a driving error, let him or her know you are sorry. Everyone makes mistakes. Returning gestures or becoming angry will not correct your mistake. It will only serve to make both of you angrier and increase the risk of confrontation or a traffic crash. Don't let yourself become a victim of road rage.

Always remember that safe driving is affected by your driving attitude and your ability to control your stress and anger.